



**TESTIMONY OF DR. ANDREA DENNIS ON BEHALF OF THE CONNECTICUT
VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

FEBRUARY 7, 2023

**HB 5441 AAC COLLEGE GRADUATES WHO WORK IN THE FIELDS OF EDUCATION
OR HEALTH CARE IN THE STATE**

Good afternoon, Senator Slap, Representative Haddad, Senator Kelly, Representative Haines and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Dr. Andrea Dennis and I am testifying on behalf of the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association, the largest professional organization for veterinarians in the state of Connecticut. I am here to support House Bill 5441 An Act Concerning College Graduates Who Work in the Fields of Education or Health Care in the State. We are asking the Committee to include veterinarians as you consider the need for health care professionals in Connecticut.

Connecticut currently does not have a veterinary school, causing students to attend schools out of state. Like most states across the country, Connecticut is experiencing a shortage of veterinarians. A recent poll of CVMA members has shown that 74% of practices with open positions for veterinarians have experienced timeframes of over a year to fill those positions. Meanwhile, pet owners may wait for weeks for routine appointments and surgeries and experience up to 8 to 10 hour waits at veterinary emergency rooms, with some ER's facing situations where they are unable to see patients at all. Practice owners also report challenges in finding relief veterinarians for vacation or illness coverage.

There are currently an average of 45 Connecticut students per graduating class in veterinary schools around the country and abroad. Those students are paying an average of \$55,000 in tuition fees as out-of-state students in addition to living expenses. Any financial relief would be a benefit to those students. Providing incentive for those students to return to Connecticut would be an advantage for veterinary practice owners and pet owners alike.

The Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association supported the Kirklyn M. Kerr program, which was passed into law by the Connecticut General Assembly and provided financial assistance to veterinary students from 2012- 2017. We continue to support that initiative and respectfully suggest that this Committee consider reinstituting that program as an avenue to assist in

veterinary recruitment. The Kirklyn Kerr program allowed for five students per class per year to be considered as in-state students at Iowa State University Veterinary School for the purposes of tuition and acceptance. Iowa State received twenty thousand dollars per student annually or eighty thousand dollars for the four years of the veterinary school program which reduced the cost for the student to in-state tuition. Students were required to return to Connecticut and practice veterinary medicine for the financial assistance to be forgiven. We believe a program such as this is in line with the goal of this legislation.

Thank you for your time.